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Tales of Slavery: Narratives of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Enslavement in Africa

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**Tales of Slavery: Narratives of Slavery,
the Slave Trade and Enslavement in Africa
University of Toronto, May 20 to 23, 2009.**



This conference is part of a larger project to collect African sources, and particularly, slave voices, for the African slave trade. It began with three pairs of scholars. In the United States, historians Sandra Greene from Cornell and Carolyn Brown from Rutgers wanted sources they could provide for students wanting to know how Africans experienced slavery and the slave trade. Independently, poet Kofi Anyidoho from Ghana and historian Ibrahima Thioub from Senegal began searching ways to access African memories. Finally, Historian Martin Klein from Toronto and anthropologist Alice Bellagamba from Milan, were seeking ways to access the slave voice.

The export of men, women and children from Africa to the America lasted over four hundred years and touched most communities in Africa, directly or indirectly. We now know a great deal about this trade: its gender and age composition, the ways in which individuals and communities responded to the trade, the extent to which warfare, kidnapping, legal mechanisms, economic processes and religious institutions generated a pool of people to be bought and sold. We know about resistance, the formation of slave-trading states and the increased use of slaves within Africa. We have some autobiographical accounts by those who were literate or achieved literacy after their capture, but these are few. Most of the sources used to write the history of slavery in Africa are European, but the memories of the external and internal slave trade remain and are embedded in African ritual, song, and memory.

This is the second conference held of the topic. The first was held in Bellagio, Italy in September 2007 and was limited to West and Northwest Africa. The Toronto conference deals with the whole of Africa and all periods up to the present. Many of the papers are based on interviews done in different parts of Africa. Others are slave narratives, some culled from mission archives and some from rare publications. Some narratives come from European consular records or from the British Navy's anti-slavery squadron. A number of papers are based on court records, both testimonies of former slaves in slave trading cases and cases involving marriage and child custody brought by former slaves. Several papers look at witchcraft belief and spirit possession at prisms through we can see the impact of the slave experience. A Canadian historian will discuss Arabic

letters between the slave agent of a Saharan commercial enterprise and his owners. Others explore proverbs, folk tales, songs and praise poems. Several explore literary representations of slavery. Novelists Lawrence Hill, Manu Herbstein and Yvette Christianse will discuss how novelists re-create past slaveries.

The conference will be open to all interested in participating. For a list of abstracts, for information about registration, and for the program, interested persons are advised to consult
http://www.yorku.ca/tubman/ConferencesWorkshops/Talesofslavery_En/index.html

Papers and source materials are being posted on the web-site. Access to the papers and documents is limited to those registered for the conference. For further information, write Martin Klein at martin.klein@utoronto.ca or Shabina Moheebulla at shabina.moheebulla@utoronto.ca.